

"The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." - Proverbs 16:9



*Defending  
Christian  
Healthcare  
Workers in  
Oregon*

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# Christian

## KINGS COUNTY NewsMagazine

DEAR  
NOELLE  
SEEKING AFTER  
*God's wisdom*



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VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1

"A Voice for the Christian Community"

[www.ChristianNewsMagazine.com](http://www.ChristianNewsMagazine.com)

## Living Nativity



**ARMONA CENTRAL P6**

## Student Spotlight



**Lola Highstreet**  
Senior at CVC **P9**

## Faith in Action



**Artistic  
Director  
Bethel  
Ballet**

**P8**

**Julia Terrazas**

# Waiting on God's Timing



**Coach Buckey Kroeze waited on God for seven years before the Central Valley Christian girls varsity volleyball team won the state championship.**

**T. M. Dinkins**  
**Kings County Publisher**

*We want to congratulate Coach Kroeze and CVC on winning the state championship! This year the CVC girls Varsity team was Valley Champs, Southern Section D-III Champs and D-III California State Champs.*

They are also the first girl's volleyball team to win a State Championship in Tulare County. This accomplishment came about by the grace of God and by the hard work of the athletes and coaches.

Coach Kroeze answered some questions about their historic season. As I went over his answers I was struck by how he has been praying for a result like this for many years. When asked about the remarkable outcome he wrote, "I think this season was providence. I prayed for an outcome like this season several years ago and we got extremely close a few times but that prayer wasn't answered until this year."

**Can you tell us what made this team so special?**

They are a great group of girls that really epitomized the word, Team.

Whether they were on the court or cheering from the sidelines, they were rooting their team on. They were very encouraging to one another and just a very humble and grateful group of girls. We've had a lot of talented players in the past but what made this so special was that there really wasn't a single standout, there were 6 players that played as a team on the court and every player on our roster helped contribute to what they achieved. That hasn't been the case in recent years.

**Can you tell us the names of the players and how many of the students were seniors and how many were on the team?**

**SEE PAGE 7**

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KINGS COUNTY

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

<div>JANUARY8</div> <div>Grace Bible Church Hanford - Indoor Games at Lemoore Rec - 11:00 am</div>	<div>JANUARY15</div> <div>Grasping God’s Word class at South Valley Community Church - 6:30 pm</div>	<div>FEBRUARY6</div> <div>Fundamentals of the Faith at Grace Bible Church Hanford - 6:30 pm</div>	<div>FEBRUARY7</div> <div>Fresno County Blossom Trail Opening Ceremony - 8:00 am - Sanger, CA</div>
<div>FEBRUARY11-13</div> <div>2025 World Ag Expo - Tulare, CA</div>	<div>FEBRUARY15</div> <div>Marriage Matters Date Night - Grace Bible Church Hanford - 6:30 pm</div>	<div>MARCH5-7</div> <div>Shepherds Conference in Sun Valley, CA</div>	<div>MARCH8</div> <div>18th Annual Webber Realty Car Show - 8:00 am - Sanger</div>
<div>MARCH4-5</div> <div>For the Valley Conference at Grace Church of the Valley in Kingsburg</div>	<div>APRIL5</div> <div>Cars on K Street in Tulare, CA - 9:00 am</div>	<div>APRIL19</div> <div>Kingsburg Chamber Car Show - 9:00 am</div>	<div>APRIL20</div> <div>Resurrection Sunday - He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!</div>



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# A Christian Growth Plan

## Christ & Common Sense



**T.M. Dinkins: County Publisher**

*The book of Ephesians has been called “The Believer’s Bank” because it has such a wealth of helpful teaching and illustrations for Christians to draw from. Ephesians 4:14-16 gives us three expectations for how believers are to grow in Christ.*

**Paul’s argument for Christian growth starts in verse 7, where he writes, “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”** Jesus Christ is the source of the gifts that are given to those in the church. The purpose of these gifts is for each believer to grow and mature in Christlikeness. If you follow Paul’s line of thought in the passage it becomes clear that believers are to grow by being equipped by the leaders of the church (Eph. 4:11) and by other believers in the church (Eph. 4:12). The end goal is for each believer to “attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13)

**The apostle Paul’s point ends with three expectations** for how each believer is to grow in Christlikeness. The first is that each believer will grow in discernment. This can be seen in verse 14, which says, “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” Paul understood that a Christian cannot grow if he is unsure of what the Bible teaches. This would be like a plant that gets choked out by weeds and thorns. A believer’s growth must be rooted in the word of God. The best way to grow in faith is to find a church that clearly teaches

the sufficiency of Scripture and the time-tested doctrine of Christianity. This will clear up any confusion the believer may have so he will be able to mature in Godliness and understanding.

**The second expectation for a Christian’s growth in Ephesians 4:14-16 is that the believer must grow in Christ.** A Christian shouldn’t spend time trying to become a disciple of a specific pastor or teacher. He or she should always be interested in becoming more like Christ. Ephesians 4:15 says, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Jesus Christ is the head of the church. The body is to grow and mature to become more like him. The way this is done is by brothers and sisters in Christ learning to “speak the truth in love” to one another.

**The third expectation for a Christian’s growth is that** each Christian will be built up by the local church. Paul returns to the image of the church as a body. He writes, “from

whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Eph. 4:16) The idea is that Christian growth is supposed to happen in the context of a healthy local church. A healthy church is like a healthy body. Each part of the body is supposed to work properly to help the body function correctly as a whole.

**The local church is the gymnasium of spiritual growth.** The local church family is where believers learn to use their gifts. It is where they have leaders who will equip them to use their gifts more effectively. The church is where each believer can play a vital role in the health of the church. The phrase “when each part is working properly” means that each believer needs to know what their gifts are. Once they discover them, they are to hone their skill. This is true whether it is preaching, teaching, serving, encouraging, prayer, or helping with organization or administration. There are many gifts and it can be eye-opening

for believers to realize that every Christian has been given gifts to help the church grow!

**Ephesians 4:14-16 shows that God expects** all believers to be growing in the context of the local church. Christians need to resist the temptation to be isolated from each other. They are to look for ways to serve each other. This lines up very well with Hebrews 10:24-25, which says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

**My prayer is that believers will read this article** and be motivated to become more involved in their local church. This will help them grow in Godliness and it will help the church grow in maturity as well.

**Pastor Tim Dinkins serves at Grace Bible Church in Hanford. He can be reached with questions and comments at:** [timothydinkins@gmail.com](mailto:timothydinkins@gmail.com)

2025

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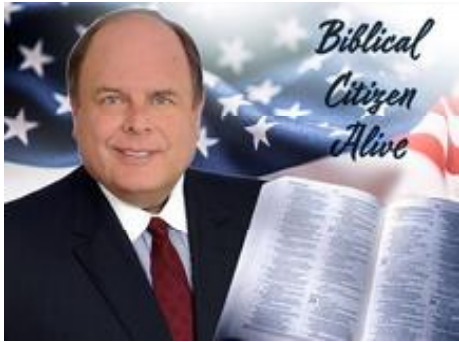
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Steve is the author of the book "Rise of the New Ethics Class" and has written articles published in the Journal of Accountancy. He is a frequent worldwide speaker on accounting, ethics and corporate governance issues.

In addition to being on the Global Board of Integra International, an international association of accounting firms, Steve also serves widely on various public, private, and not-for-profit boards and committees. He is Chairman of the Swenson Children's Foundation, a faith-based organization whose mission is to provide physical and educational resources to improve the lives of children and families.

Steve holds a BS degree from Bob Jones University and an MBA from the University of Georgia. In 2020 he was named Bob Jones University's Alumnus of the Year.

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# PJI Takes on Oregon Again to Defend Christian Healthcare Worker Denied Benefits



***SALEM, OR. – Pacific Justice Institute is headed back to the Oregon Court of Appeals for Round 2 in its fight for a Christian health-care worker who was denied unemployment benefits on multiple occasions after declining to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.***

PJI represents Alison K. Lavelle-Hayden, a respiratory therapist who formerly worked at Legacy Health's Good Samaritan Hospital (Legacy) in

Portland. A practicing Seventh-day Adventist, Lavelle-Hayden holds a religious objection to receiving COVID-19 vaccines due to their connection to abortion.

After Legacy denied Lavelle-Hayden's request for a religious exception from Oregon's requirement that healthcare workers be vaccinated against COVID-19 at the height of the pandemic – something both Title VII and Oregon law allowed – and subsequently fired her for not receiving the vaccine, Lavelle-Hayden applied for unemployment benefits. For various reasons, both Oregon's Office of Administrative Hearings and the state's Employment Appeals Board (EAB) denied Lavelle-Hayden benefits, citing misconduct on her part.

Oregon's Court of Appeals overturned the EAB's first ruling in 2023, finding that the EAB's decision was not supported by substantial evidence and remanding the



case to the EAB for further consideration. After re-examining the evidence, the EAB found new reasons to deny Lavelle-Hayden unemployment benefits. Specifically, the EAB held that Lavelle-Hayden's beliefs were not religious in nature – despite both compelling evidence to the contrary and Supreme Court rulings overwhelmingly supporting her position.

PJI's Oregon-based staff attorney, Ray D. Hacke, has petitioned the Court of Appeals a second time and is asking the court to reverse the EAB's decision again, this time without remand. Oral arguments are scheduled to take place in Lavelle-Hayden's case on Monday, November 18, at 9 a.m. via videoconference.

"The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled unequivocally on multiple occasions that state employment benefit agencies, such as the EAB, cannot punish workers who lose their jobs for adhering to sincerely held religious beliefs by denying them benefits," Hacke said. "The COVID-19 pandemic did not change that."

"The EAB has tried to get around this by pointing to evidence in the record indicating that Ms. Lavelle-Hayden's beliefs aren't truly religious, while ignoring overwhelming evidence that her beliefs are, in fact, rooted in religion, which is all that the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment requires. Because Ms. Lavelle-Hayden has easily met her minimal

burden on that point, we appealed."

Lavelle-Hayden's case has implications for healthcare workers nationwide who lost their jobs for not receiving COVID-19 vaccines on religious grounds and have had trouble obtaining unemployment benefits as a result.

"There is no place in government for hostility toward religious beliefs – none," PJI President Brad Dacus said. "The EAB's repeated denials of unemployment benefits to Alison Lavelle-Hayden show overwhelming anti-religious bias. As defenders of religious freedom, we at PJI cannot allow the EAB's unconstitutional actions to stand. We thus pray that the Oregon Court of Appeals gets it right a second time and awards Ms. Lavelle-Hayden the unemployment benefits to which she is constitutionally entitled."

**"Publisher's update: On December 18, 2024 the Oregon court of appeals awarded unemployment benefits to Alison K. Lavelle-Hayden."**

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# Living Nativity IN ARMONA

**T.M. Dinkins: County Publisher**

*Do you ever get tired of seeing Santa, snowmen and the Grinch crowding out the true meaning of Christmas?*

**Thankfully, there is a family-friendly event** that is focused on reminding people of what actually took place at the birth of Christ. It is the Living Nativity drive thru located at **14341 Hanford Armona Rd in Armona.**

**Pastor Ken McMillan of Armona Central Church** told me the church has been providing the Living Nativity to the community for four years. The original idea was to give people an experience of what it would have been like to walk down the streets of Bethlehem on the night the Christ child was born.

**The living nativity requires extensive planning, generous donations of animals and supplies,** and a small army of volunteers. This year close to ninety people volunteered to act as Roman soldiers, wise men, shepherds, Caesar Augustus, angels, and Mary and Joseph. Cars enter the nativity on Hanford-Armona road and follow a two-lane path that starts with Caesar’s decree and ends with the birth of Christ.

**Pastor Ken described how the event has grown every year.** This year they added a donkey and a grain millstone, wise men, and a dramatic appearance of an angel on top of a two story tower! The living nativity is hosted on land that is owned by the church. In the future the church is hoping to build a new sanctuary and a gymnasium that can be used by the community.

**When asked why he is investing in the community,** pastor McMillan said, “I’m not doing it for myself. I want to build this for my kids and grandkids.”





# Waiting on God's Timing

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE:

There were seventeen players and four of them were seniors: Tara Kroeze - Junior, Kate Verhoeven - Junior, Jori Hughes - Junior, Ava Gambini - Sophomore, Siena Shaffer - Senior, Ella Burton - Senior, Emerson Kroeze - Sophomore Madyson Hastings - Senior, Ella DeJonge - Junior, Ally Lane - Junior, Claire Phillips - Junior, Lola Highstreet - Senior, Cooper Piepgrass - Junior, Emma Mihalcin - Junior, Caroline Mihalcin - Freshman, Abigail Heeringa - Junior, Wren Graham - Sophomore

**It would be great to know how long the head coach has been coaching at CVC and what the record of the team was this season.**

This is my seventh season as Head Coach. Our overall record was 38-9 and we set a new school record for the most wins in a single season for Volleyball.

**If possible, was there a specific game or two that were especially difficult? How did the team manage to overcome the difficulties and persevere to the end?**

Our Valley Championship game was one of our toughest matches against San Joaquin Memorial. They were a great team that had some very athletic outside hitters that were tough to stop. We ultimately made fewer errors than they did which allowed us to win. We were able to connect with our middles better than them and our team ultimately passed the ball better than they did.

We had two very competitive regional playoff matches, one against Point Loma from San Diego and the other match against, El Dorado from Placentia. With both matches, they had two powerful outside hitters that could score. We were just able to pass

the ball better than both of those teams and ultimately committed fewer errors. As I said, we really didn't have a specific standout, there were six players that really pulled it together to play as a unit and win in all of those tough matches.

**Who was the final game against and where did they play?**

Our final match was against, Monta Vista from San Francisco. The final match was played at Santiago Canyon College in Orange, Ca.

**Were there any injuries on the team during the season?**

No, thankfully we stayed healthy throughout the entire season. Some bumps and bruises along the way but thankfully no major injuries to speak of.

**Joshua 1:9 says, "Have I not commanded you be strong and courageous, do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." How did the faith of the students on the team make a difference during the year?**

I think this season was providence. I prayed for an outcome like this season several years ago and we got extremely close a few times but that prayer wasn't answered until this year. We did devotions each week to help bring our team together. There wasn't anything that sticks out, just that the team was active in their faith throughout the entire season. We discussed a few times about God's will and if it was just that, then we are at peace about the outcome.

**Are any of the students planning on returning to play next year? Are any of the players going to be playing in college?**

All but four players are expected to return. Yes, as of right now, there is one player that recently committed to play volleyball at Fresno Pacific University, Lola Highstreet and we are very excited for her.

*Congratulations!*





# Faith in ACTION



## Julia Terrazas Artistic Director Bethel Ballet

By: T.M. Dinkins

**It would be great to know how Bethel Ballet started. What led the owner/director to start it and how did it begin?**

Amy Rees started Bethel Ballet Academy in 2004 after Miss Jeanne's school closed. Miss Jeanne taught Amy and Amy wanted to continue to provide Ballet training to the Hanford area. Our goal has always been to provide a safe, Godly environment for young people to learn ballet without the toxic environment that secular ballet tends to build. Bethel means "House of God" and not only did Amy want to create a sacred house for the worship of God, she wanted each and every student to view their bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit as well. Our goal is to train them in the pursuit of excellence while glorifying God with the creativity and talent He has gifted them.

**Can you let us know how long you have been the artistic director of Bethel Ballet (is that the right title?) Also, how did you first become connected with the group?**

I have officially carried the title of Artistic Director for two years now. I started dancing with Bethel Ballet in 2004 when I was 3 years old. All of my older siblings danced with Amy at Miss Jeanne's School and stayed with Amy when she opened Bethel Ballet. I started as a Teacher's Assistant (TA) in high school and worked up the ranks as a teacher starting with the youngest age group and working my way up.

**What is your favorite part of working with the students?**

I love everything about them! Every age group has its own humor, logic, learning style, and dedication. I can't tell you how many times they've made me laugh, made up their own words to go with my French, or given me an entirely new perspective on something I've been teaching for years. My favorite thing is the bonds we create. I have lifelong friends from my time at Bethel and I still talk to students who have long moved on from ballet. Having those bonds and also getting to witness my students find those relationships in each other is the most fulfilling thing I can imagine. There is so much love and support throughout the entire studio. We pray for each other, support and encourage each other, and show Christ's love to each other.

**The Nutcracker is always a special performance. How many years have you been presenting the ballet and why is it so popular?**

Amy did Nutcrackers in 2006-2008 and then had to pause to build up her new studio. We started full-scale Nutcrackers again in 2019. In the space between those times, we had a small touring company called Coram Deo that toured schools and rest homes in the area and did excerpts from Nutcracker as well as worship pieces.

Nutcracker in itself is iconic. Even people who know nothing about ballet know about the Nutcracker. It's up there with Swan Lake and Giselle. I think the reason it's so popular is because it feels like part of the Christmas season. We get a tree, we sing carols, and we hear the Sugar Plum Variation music playing in the department stores. Going out to your local theatre and seeing local kids perform such a classic is an excellent Christmas tradition, I think.

**How many students and coaches are involved in the performance? How long does it take to prepare for it?**

Amy is not only our owner and executive director but also our seamstress. She and I start working on preparing casting, choreography, and costumes as early as April. We usually announce casting and start working with the students in October. We have 3 other teachers on staff and lots of parent volunteers helping by December to get everything in place. There are so many moving parts and we would not be able to run this show without all our amazing staff and volunteers.

**The parents are very involved in the rehearsals and preparation. What is it like to work with such a great group of parents?**

I could sit here and give you a list a mile long of all the parents who have helped me this year. Many of the parents I've known for years but, just as many, I've only just met, and they all support our studio so well. Everyone is so willing to step in when we need them, roll with the punches when something inevitably goes wrong, and sacrifice their time to help in small ways. So many of our families are military, have other kids in other extracurriculars, or live outside of Hanford, but each and every one of them is still present with us.

**Our culture does not support modesty in young women. Why does Bethel Ballet choose to use modest costumes and uplifting performances?**

It is so important to us to protect our students. We want to keep them safe and comfortable. We are called to be like Christ and be an example of Christ to others. We are told to be humble and quiet, not to flaunt and be flashy. We choose modesty so the focus can be on the story behind the dancing, not on the dancers' bodies. We believe that dance truly gets cheapened when the technique or the costumes get sexualized. There is such a push from our current culture to hypersexualize dance children and we absolutely want to create an intentionally different counter-culture dance space that is God-honoring. We want to encourage students to be like Daniel, to stand out and not be afraid to clash with the culture.

**The Bible refers to both internal and external beauty (1 Pt. 3:3-4). Why is it so important to emphasize both types of beauty?**

We are made in God's image, therefore we are beautiful in his eyes. There is no need to deny that we are beautiful when he made us to be that way. Internal beauty is that much more important because it is our spirit-- our kindness, our love for others, our joy in the Lord, our patience and grace with each other when we make mistakes-- that shines our light to the Lord and leads others to Christ. Bethel Ballet strives for excellence in our craft to praise God with the gifts he gave us, and shine a light on what God made in us.



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# Student Spotlight



By: T.M. Dinkins

## Lola Highstreet Senior CVC

**What is it like playing volleyball at Central Valley Christian?**

Playing volleyball at CVC is awesome. Being on an athletic team at a small school gives you many opportunities to get to know your teammates well. You are able to build a relationship with your teammates on and off the court. The support that we get from everyone around us at CVC is amazing and they are always there to show their support and cheer us on.

**God has given you a unique set of skills for playing volleyball. How does**

**your relationship with God help you in life and in sports?**

My relationship with God helps me in life and in sports in many ways. In life there are many things that come my way. Even in sports, if something doesn't go the way you want it you need to trust God and know that he has a plan for everything happening in your life. God has given me these gifts and I want to make sure that I use them to honor and glorify him whether I'm on the court or off the court.

**You have some great coaches and teammates. How have your coaches helped you develop as a player?**

Over the past three years, I have learned a lot from my coaches and they have shaped me into the athlete I am today. My coaches are always

there to help and they are very supportive. They have taught me what it is like to be a leader on the court and how to lead the team well. They have also helped me by spending many hours practicing and putting in the work to become the best that I can be.

**You had a remarkable season! How long have you played volleyball at CVC? What has been a highlight or one of your favorite games so far?**

I have been playing volleyball at CVC for the past four years. Starting out on the freshman team I worked my

way up to varsity for the next three years. I have enjoyed getting to play volleyball with some of my really good friends and creating new friendships with people. One of my favorite games was beating Fresno Christian in the 3rd set of a very close game to win the Redwood tournament.

Since you are in your senior year, what are you hoping to do after graduating? After graduating this year, I will attend Fresno Pacific University to continue my athletic and academic career and major in Kinesiology.

**You have a great family supporting you. How has your family helped you in life and in sports?**

Coming from a big family that always shows up and supports me is pretty great. My family has helped me in sports by taking me to practice, showing up to games, traveling to tournaments, encouraging me, and simply just being there for me.

My family has helped me become the best person that I can be and they have taught me what it's like to be someone who loves and lives for Christ.

**Do you have any advice for other athletes in the valley who are wanting to have a balanced academic, athletic, and spiritual life?**

My advice to other athletes is to always keep God first and to make sure to make time for all the important things. Make time to spend with God, make time to work on homework, and study, and lastly make sure that you enjoy playing the sport that you're playing because that's going to make the process so much better.



Lola Highstreet  
Senior at CVC

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# Highlights from the Pastors Dinner 2024

By: T.M. Dinkins



**Central Valley Fellowship (CVF) finished out another encouraging year with the annual Pastors dinner, which took place on Friday, Nov. 1, 2024 and was hosted by Grace Church of the Valley in Kingsburg. The following description includes some of the highlights from the evening.**

**The Teaching.** Pastor Scott Ardavanis gave an insightful message on “The Ministry of Love” from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. He highlighted certain descriptions of love that were especially pertinent to our pastors.

**The Food.** The teaching provided an excellent spiritual meal for our couples, while the steak and chicken dinner provided much needed sustenance for those present. Someone said the steak was, “The best I’ve had in the valley.” That is high praise considering how much meat is eaten here in El Valle Central!

**The Fellowship.** I spoke with one pastor who had never attended the Pastors Dinner before. He said he and his wife appreciated the camaraderie they experienced at their table. They were able to meet another couple for the first time. This may seem like a small benefit of the dinner, but it is always striking how helpful it is for our pastors to connect vis-à-vis at our events. Relationships deepen when we are able to communicate over a shared meal.

**The Worship.** What a blessing to have the GCV worship team lead us in

worship. I enjoyed singing a worship song that was new to me, “There is a Gospel” by Jonny Robinson and Rich Thompson. It was also a treat to listen to Reuben and Natalie Woodfield sing “Shepherd.”

**The Festivities.** As a fellow emcee, I always appreciate when someone can help break the ice by introducing ways for the couples to interact. This year was no exception as our energetic host challenged each person to take some

of the merchandise, books, and even extra flowers with them. Andy Woodfield also encourage us to meet new people at the event, which was a great way to help strengthen friendships at the dinner.

**Central Valley Fellowship (CVF)** is an association of pastors and missionaries bound together by love for the Living Word, the Master, our Lord Jesus, the church for which He died, and the bold proclamation of the exposed written word. The Fellowship’s purpose is to support the mission and leadership of the local church by connecting and networking like-minded pastors and missionaries who share core biblical convictions of doctrine and praxis.







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1 Thessalonians 5:11

**The arrival of a new year is a moment of renewal, reflection, and anticipation. For Christians, it's a time to celebrate God's faithfulness** in the past and prepare our hearts for His plans in the year ahead. Each year is a gift from God, an opportunity to grow in faith, serve others, and walk more closely with Christ. As we step into this new season, let us embrace it with a sense of purpose and a deep trust in the One who holds our future.

#### Reflecting on God's Faithfulness

Before we charge ahead, it's important to pause and reflect on the ways

God has been faithful in our lives. The Bible often calls us to remember God's deeds, as doing so strengthens our trust in Him. In Psalm 77:11-12, the psalmist declares, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on your mighty deeds." Take time to thank God for His provision, protection, and guidance over the past year. Even in the challenges, His presence has been constant. Reflecting on His faithfulness gives us confidence to face the uncertainties of the future. Write these reflections down, and allow them to serve as a reminder of His goodness in difficult moments.

#### Renewing Our Commitment to Christ

The new year offers a fresh start, and as Christians, it's an ideal time to renew our commitment to Christ. Jesus invites us to abide in Him, for apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). This year, make it a priority to deepen your relationship with Him through regular prayer, Bible study, and worship. Set aside distractions and cultivate a heart that seeks Him first. When our spiritual roots grow deep, we can stand firm in any season, drawing strength and wisdom from our relationship with God. Surround yourself with a supportive community of believers who will encourage you in your walk with Christ.

#### Living Out Love and Service

The new year also calls us to live out our faith through love and service.

Jesus commands us to love God and love our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-39). In a world often marked by division and suffering, Christians are called to be salt and light, bringing hope and healing wherever we go. Consider how you can use your time, talents, and resources to bless others this year. Whether it's serving in your local church, reaching out to the marginalized, or simply showing kindness in everyday interactions, your actions can reflect Christ's love and make an eternal impact. In doing so, we fulfill the call to be His ambassadors in a world that desperately needs His grace and truth.

#### Trusting God for the Future

Finally, let us approach the new year with unwavering hope and trust in God's sovereignty. While we cannot predict what the year will bring, we know that God's plans are good. Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Even when the path ahead seems uncertain, we can walk in confidence, knowing that God's grace is sufficient and His timing is perfect. Let us lay our burdens, fears, and dreams at His feet, trusting that He will lead us in paths of righteousness.

As we journey into this new year, let us commit to growing in faith, serving with love, and trusting God's plan. May

our hearts be filled with hope and joy as we embrace each day as an opportunity to glorify Him. With Christ as our foundation, we can face the future boldly, assured that He will guide us every step of the way. Let us rejoice in His unchanging love, stepping forward in faith to fulfill His purpose in our lives.

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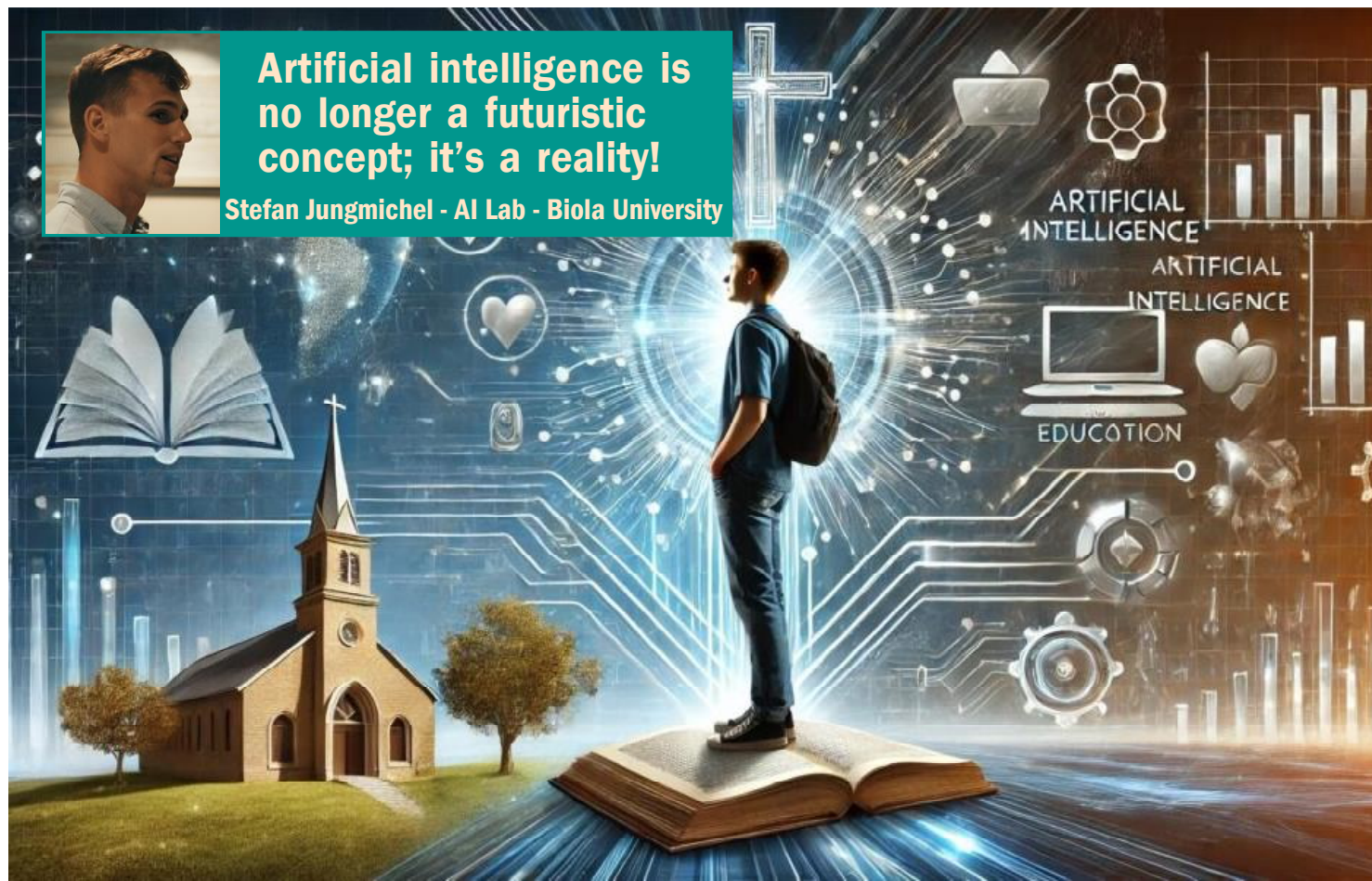
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# AI for God's Kingdom: Transforming Christian Ministry



Artificial intelligence is no longer a futuristic concept; it's a reality!

Stefan Jungmichel - AI Lab - Biola University

In an era where technology continually redefines the way we live and work, artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a transformative tool for Christian organizations, offering new ways to enhance ministry and outreach. The question now is not whether AI has the potential to change the landscape of ministry—but how Christian organizations can embrace it to further their mission.

## Stefan Jungmichel AI Lab-Biola University

**AI has already demonstrated its ability to revolutionize industries.** Amazon, for example, has used AI to save an astounding 4,500 years of developer work, while The Chosen, the popular TV series based on the life of Jesus, is now the most translated show in history, with plans to reach 600 languages through AI-assisted technology.

**For Christian ministries, these advancements offer a glimpse into how AI could be harnessed to amplify impact and streamline operations.**

**At Biola University, this vision has led to the creation of two major initiatives:** the AI Lab and the AI Studio. The AI Lab focuses on the ethical use of AI, conducting research and offering educational resources to ensure Christian organizations can adopt AI in alignment with biblical values. Meanwhile, the AI Studio provides practical, hands-on support to help

ministries and nonprofits develop AI-driven solutions that meet their specific needs. These initiatives reflect Biola's commitment to helping Christians leverage AI to further God's Kingdom.

**The benefits of AI for Christian organizations are clear.** AI can handle time-consuming administrative tasks such as scheduling, data processing, and content generation, freeing up staff to focus on building relationships and community. It can also be used to brainstorm innovative outreach strategies, target specific audiences more effectively, and manage donations with greater precision.

**However, the adoption of AI is not without its challenges.** Many within the Christian community have expressed concerns about whether AI could replace human creativity or detract from the personal nature of ministry. Biola University takes these concerns seriously, continuing to research and explore the ethical implications of AI's role in the church.

While these are valid considerations, Biola's experts believe AI can enhance, rather than diminish, our God-given abilities to serve others.

**This transformation is already underway, and the opportunities** it offers for Christian organizations are profound. By embracing AI, ministries can expand their reach and impact, helping more people while remaining true to their core values.

**For those interested in learning how to bring this technology into their ministry,** the AI Lab at Biola University is hosting a 1.5-hour workshop on Saturday February 8th at 10 AM. This will explore how AI can empower Christian organizations. The event will showcase practical ways to excel in creating custom AI projects, content creation, enhance donation management, and more. Gain insights into how AI can support your mission, giving you more time to focus on relationships and community-building while letting AI handle the background tasks.



**DRAN REESE** President  
Salt & Light Council

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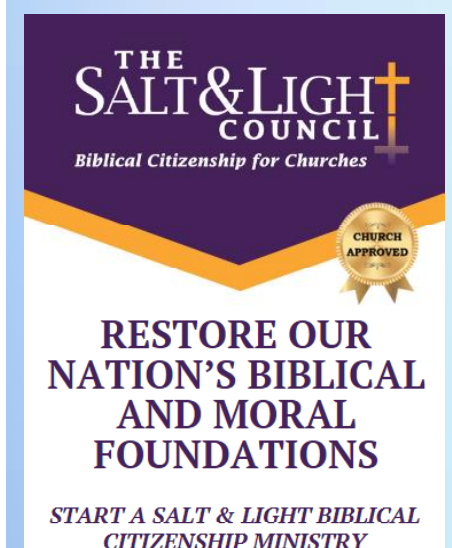
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# DEAR NOELLE

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**DEAR NOELLE** by Noelle B. Nightingale

**Biblical Counsel for Christian Women**

Dear Noelle,

**I like the church I'm going to. Everyone seems really nice, and the messages are interesting.** I'm just bothered that I hardly see any women doing anything up front. It seems like the men do everything. I asked the pastor about it, and he said that the Bible says that only men should be pastors. That doesn't seem fair. Does the Bible really say that?

— Confused

Dear "Confused,"

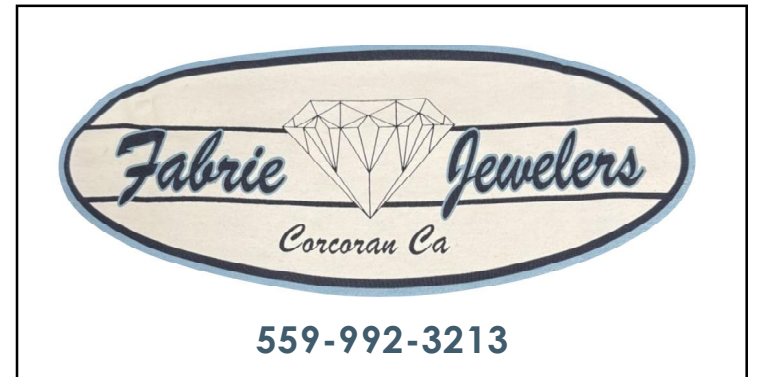
**It's good that you are asking questions about what the Bible says** about the roles of men and women in the church. I probably need more space to answer this question than I can fit here, but I will do my best to point you to some answers in the Bible. Remember, the Bible is God's Word. God never makes mistakes; His Word is always true, and His way is always best for us even if we don't fully understand it.

**Before I answer your question,** it is important to understand that God made men and women differently and gave them different roles, but He also made them to be equal in value because both are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). To see the different roles, we must look at Genesis 2, where there is a beautiful description of how God formed Adam from the dust and then breathed life into him (Gen. 2:7). God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and keep it (Gen. 2:15). Then after God brought all of the animals to Adam to be named, Adam realized that there was no one suitable for him. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." (Gen. 2:18) So God put Adam into a deep sleep and took a rib from his side to fashion his wife Eve.

**So we see that from the beginning of time,** God gave man the task of taking care of His world, and He gave woman the task of supporting her husband and helping him to fulfill this responsibility. We know that these roles were good because the Bible says that God saw all that He made, and it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

**Understanding that God made men and women equal** in value but different in roles is key to understanding what the Bible says about men and women's roles in both the church and in the home. In fact, the Bible explains men and women's roles in the church by pointing to God's design at creation (1 Tim. 2:13).

**So, to answer your question: yes, the Bible does say that only men should be pastors and elders in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:6)).** In fact, God's specific instructions for the church go beyond this to say that women are not to teach men in the church or to be in positions of authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). This may be why you don't see very many women up front on a Sunday morning at your church. As a woman who does quite a bit of teaching (of women and children) in my church, I can tell you that I have personally spent a lot of time studying these passages to be certain of God's instructions here. And I can also tell you that I do not feel like it's unfair that I don't get to teach men. In fact, I am thankful for the men that God has placed in leadership in the church to teach the men. This frees me up to focus on teaching the women and the children in the church, which is also a significant task. And I think everyone is happier when the men are teaching the men and the women are teaching the women in the church. In fact, this is the model that God gave to the church: for older men to train younger men and for older women to train younger women (Titus 2:1-8).



**So why is it good for women to let men lead the church and the home?** I think the best answer to this is that God designed it this way. He said that it is good, and that means that He will bless women who follow His instructions. This doesn't mean that women are in any way inferior. The role of women is just as important as the role of men; they're different and are designed to compliment each other. There is joy, peace, and contentment for those who do things God's way. There is also a beauty and a harmony of relationships within the church when women willingly choose to follow the lead of the pastors and elders that God has raised up within that church. Women can make the job of the pastor very difficult if they want to, but a woman who is content in her God-given role can have a huge positive impact on the entire congregation. May we be gracious women who exalt Christ and not ourselves.

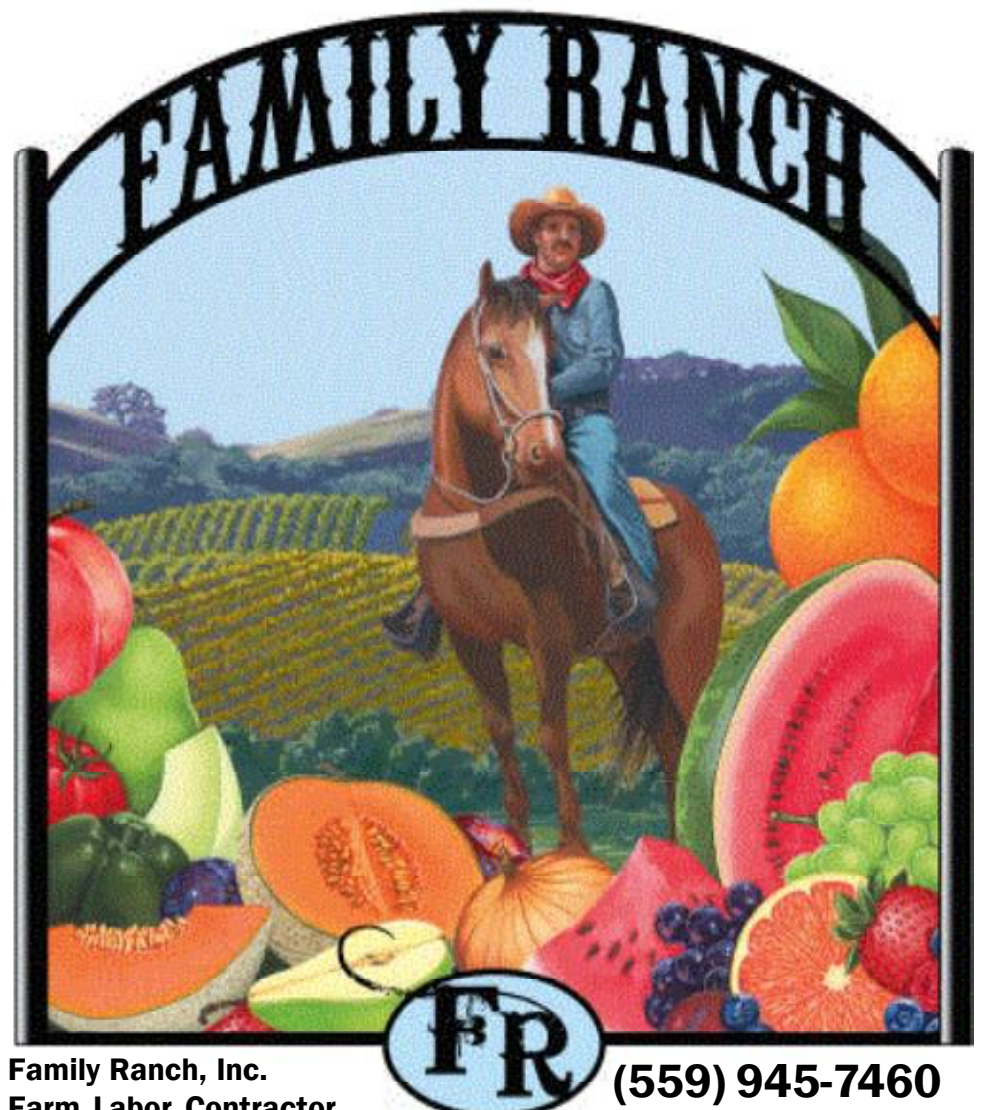
By His grace,

Noelle

\*Noelle B. Nightingale is a wife and mother and enjoys counseling women in the church.

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